PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT MATTERS

INSIDE

Brownbag Recap: Benchmarking in Local Government

At the first joint brownbag lunch of the Performance Measurement Team and the Competitiveness Task Force held on February 10, 2000, two County employees, Patti Stevens from the Department of Systems Management for Human Services and James Patteson from the Office of Capital Facilities, shared their insight and experience with benchmarking. Since this information was well received, and is timely for many involved in continuous improvement and performance measurement initiatives, this article summarizes their remarks.

As noted by both speakers, benchmarking is a technique utilized by public and private enterprises to improve services and products. The objective of benchmarking is to identify industry leaders, learn from their best practices, and adapt and import these ideas into your own organization. By learning from others' successes, an organization is able to evolve more rapidly without having to reinvent the wheel.

Benchmarking and other continuous improvement tools are becoming ever more important for local government organizations. As private enterprises have fine-tuned their business practices to deliver better services, the expectation for high-quality public services has also grown. In response to these higher expectations, local governments are focusing on the results (or outcomes) of their efforts and how efficiently these services are delivered. This translates to a new focus on performance measures that are results- or outcome-based. Performance measures provide the data that is necessary to compare the efficiency and effectiveness of services and to evaluate improvement efforts. Benchmarking is using that data to improve services.

A benchmarking process typically contains four phases: a planning phase, a data collection phase, an analysis phase, and an action phase. In the planning phase, the benchmarking subject is selected, the performance variables are chosen, and industry leaders are identified. In the data collection phase, performance information is obtained (typically by a survey) from the industry leaders to identify best practices. Follow-up interviews are then conducted to gain an understanding of the processes that make up these best practices. Analysis of the data is then conducted to identify performance gaps within the initiating organization and to select practices to adapt and import. The action phase consists of developing specific plans to import the lessons learned into the organization and to monitor the results.

James Patteson utilized this process in benchmarking the County's public facilities development practices with other local jurisdictions and federal agencies. A number of valuable insights were obtained through this benchmarking effort on how to improve the County's facility development process, as well as how to conduct an effective benchmarking study. If anyone would like to obtain additional information on the study or on benchmarking, please contact James Patteson at 324-5165 or Patti Stevens at 324-7132.

MAKING THE MAIN THING THE MAIN THING: IDENTIFYING THE MISSION

By Laura Golberg
Department of Information Technology

But when I came to consider local government, I began to see how it was in essence the first line of defense thrown up by the community against our common enemies—poverty, sickness, ignorance, isolation, mental derangement and social maladjustment.
Winifred Holtby, 1934

A former Fairfax County Superintendent of Schools, kept a sign on his desk: "The Main Thing is to keep the Main Thing the Main Thing." For him, it was simple — the Main Thing for both him, personally, and the school system was the education of children. Issues as disparate as construction, crossing guards, and the PTA all contribute to this Main Thing.

In spite of tempting salaries for IT professionals in the private sector, a colleague of mine in DIT works for the County because the ultimate mission of the County is to serve citizens, rather than to concentrate on profits, and that is important to her. This personal mission also finds its expression within that of the County.

I have been involved with many facets of County government during my tenure here in Fairfax. When it comes down to it, all agencies in the County are contributing to the County's ultimate mission of *serving our citizens*. However, we do it many different ways. For example, protecting health and welfare from making sure that the sanitary sewers are able to flow without impediments, to immunizing children. And then there's the Library, with a mission "To meet evolving informational, and recreational needs of ... residents by providing appropriate resources and services." Scratch the surface and we are all contributing to our Main Thing of serving the public, or as Mrs. Holtby put it, providing a first line of defense against our common enemies; in the Library's case, ignorance.

At the cost center level, the mission is a subset of the agency's mission, which in turn is a subset of the County's. Whether it's as seemingly remote from delivering services to citizens as upgrading a computer system or purchasing police vehicles, these internal services allow our employees to serve the public better. In the Library example, the Technical Services cost center provides and facilitates access to information and materials, a subset of the Library's Main Thing. By doing this, they contribute to the agency's mission and the County's "Main Thing" of serving citizens.

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NOTE: An article in the last edition of the newsletter PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND THE COMPETITIVENESS MODEL spoke about the convergence of the Competitiveness Model and Performance Measurement. This is a follow-up article, helping those who work in this area to identify where to begin in planning and delivering effective and efficient services.

WANTED

Since accountability and performance measurement are Countywide priorities, a key principle of the Performance Measurement (PM) Team has been to include representation from agencies beyond the Department of Management and Budget (DMB), which is the coordinating agency. It is essential to the success of the effort to have input and buy-in from agencies with different perspectives. Consequently, the current team is composed of staff from 9 outside agencies and 5 from DMB.

The typical term for members is approximately one year, with the option to extend participation. Since most of the existing members joined last spring and several will be cycling off the team, this creates the opportunity for other County staff to join the PM effort.

The Team is now seeking 2-3 new members. Interested individuals should be team-players with initiative and a Countywide perspective; good communication skills; willing to meet every other week for 1-2 hours at the Government Center, as well as able to handle some assignments outside of regular meetings. It is important that the employee have the approval and support of his/her agency director and direct supervisor. Benefits to the agency of team participation include enhanced understanding of the County's PM methodology and the opportunity to influence the future direction of this effort.

If you are interested in participating on the PM Team, please send a brief synopsis of your skills and how your participation will benefit you, your agency, and the County. Please indicate as well your agency director's approval. Forward this to The PM Team, c/o DMB by **May 1, 2000**.

ON EXCELLENCE

The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field or endeavor.

— *Vince Lombardi*

Visit the PM Website:

http://infoweb/omb/pfmeasure.htm

UPCOMING TRAINING

As noted in the January edition of the Performance Matters newsletter, the PM Team will be offering four different classes during April and May 2000. The Basic PM Class provides an introduction to the PM system that Fairfax County uses, particularly its terminology and methodology. The Advanced Class, entitled Managing for Results, is intended for those who are responsible for using the PM system to manage. A prerequisite is to have attended the Basic PM Class. Based on popular demand, the Data Collection and Surveying Classes will again be offered. All of these classes are half-day and can be registered for by contacting Cathy Spage of the PM Team at 324-4079. Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis. Additional training may be added if there is sufficient interest.

EVENT	DATE/TIME	LOCATION
Basic PM Training	April 27, 2000 8:30-11:30 a.m.	CR 2-3, GC
Advanced PM Training – Managing for Results	April 28, 2000 8:30-11:30 a.m.	CR 2-3, GC
Data Collection Class	May 4, 2000 8:30-11:30 a.m.	CR 2-3, GC
Surveying for Customer Satisfaction Class	May 5, 2000 8:30-11:30 a.m.	CR 2-3, GC
Basic PM Training	May 11, 2000 8:30-11:30 a.m.	CR 2-3, GC
Advanced PM Training – Managing for Results	May 11, 2000 1:00-4:00 p.m.	CR 2-3, GC

MORE ON EXCELLENCE

Excellence is the result of caring more than others think is wise; risking more than others think is safe; dreaming more than others think is practical; and expecting more than others think is possible.

— *Unknown*

You Tell Us

If there are any topics of interest you would like to see addressed in future issues of this PM Newsletter, please forward your suggestions or questions to Barbara Emerson in the Department of Management and Budget (e-mail BEMERS).